



Natural Resources Conservation Service
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March 27, 2009

To: Members of the Appropriations Committee

RE: IMPACTS FROM THE LOSS OF COMMUNITY INVESTMENT ACT FUNDS
(Bill 828, Sec. 1w)

Since 1996 the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program has successfully partnered with the Connecticut Farmland Preservation Program to purchase the development rights to farmland. As part of a national program, the total allocation of funding to Connecticut has been 15.67 million dollars. Of that amount, over 13 million dollars have been obligated to the CT Department of Agriculture through cooperative agreements to share in the cost of purchasing conservation easements. This 12 year effort has resulted in over 7,000 acres of protected farmland. The funding and staffing made available through the Community Investment Act has been integral to our accelerated efforts to protect farmland and farm viability. We feel a continuation of our success is in jeopardy by the potential loss of the Community Investment Act (CIA) funds.

For Connecticut to partner with NRCS on farmland preservation and leverage the 3.9 to 7.7 million dollars that will be available annually for the next five years, the State must show that they can match the federal funding, as federal funds cannot exceed 50% of a project's costs. The Community Investment Act would be an important source for these matching funds. Unspent annual NRCS funds are allocated to other states or returned to Washington.

In addition, Connecticut NRCS allocations are based on a national formula that rewards timely easement closings. Projects that close within 18 months improve a state's formula score and result in an increased allocation. The CT Department of Agriculture staffing funded by the CIA is essential to meeting this 18 month benchmark, and to maintain or increase federal funding. This same staff is also needed to meet your partner obligation of monitoring and enforcement of existing easements.

Connecticut is a leader in successfully leveraging federal funds to protect farmland and create agriculturally based economic development. The funding available through CIA has played an important role. Please consider the impact of the potential loss of matching funds from the NRCS in your decision on Bill 828.

Sincerely,

Kipen J. Kolesinskas
State Soil Scientist/FRPP Program Manager

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